1st ANNIVERSARY

NewsLetter

"It's hard to believe that I created this Newsletter one year ago and with having very little knowledge of designing newsletters but wanting to help as many people as possible. The Saratoga Bridges Newsletter has arrived and filled with knowledge in every issue. I just want to say thanks to all my fellow techs, for helping me make this happen" – Phil Ellsworth, Editor

The Ten-Second Hack That Could Save Your Finances

Let's get right to it: the best way to securely access your banking? MFA. Hands down. Multi-Factor Authentication is not optional anymore—it's essential.

Here's how it works. You log in with your username and password, and then you're asked for a second code—usually from your phone, an app, a text, or sometimes your email. This second step is your moat, your firewall, your secret knock. Without it, you're relying on a single password, which let's be honest, is like guarding your treasure chest with a screen door.

Now, some folks push back on MFA. They say it's inconvenient. Or they worry their phone might get hacked. Let's clear that up: it is extremely hard to remotely hack a phone. Hollywood loves the myth of some hoodie-wearing hacker tapping into your life with a few keystrokes—but that's fantasy. There's a reason the U.S. government had to fight Apple to get into a locked iPhone. If they can't crack it with all their resources, chances are your phone is safe—especially if it's up to date and protected.

So what does MFA do for you? Everything. It's a simple step—takes about ten seconds—but it blocks nearly all the common ways criminals get in. Even if they steal your password, they can't log in without your second device.

Here's the takeaway: if you haven't enabled MFA on your bank accounts, PayPal, retirement funds, or any other critical service, you are gambling—and the odds are not in your favor.

So do the smart thing. Take ten seconds. Lock it down.

How Did I End Up in IT?

Great question. The short version? Accidentally… but with a master's degree.

Back in 2011, I wrapped up my master's with a focus on memory—both the human kind and the kind stored in distributed human systems (which, at the time, were cutting-edge and confusing to most people, including me). I was fascinated by distributed intelligence—a sort of prehistoric version of the AI everyone's buzzing about now. I even published a book that year titled Design of Software Assisted Transactive Memory—sounds impressive, right? It was basically me nerding out over how people and computers could think better together.

At one point, I had to choose between diving deeper into machine learning... or music.

Seriously. I was torn between AI and guitars. Guess which one let me wear cooler clothes?

Ultimately, I followed my first love: music. I specialized in voice and guitar, and I haven't looked back. That, along with mentoring and leadership, is where I really shine.

As for the hardcore programming, I leave that to talents like Kurt Freeman and Ken Ash. Need elegant systems managed? Call Mike Kanaby. Got a PC that's possessed? Phil's your guy. I'm lucky to be part of a team with brains, talent, and enough acronyms between us to crash a spellchecker.

So yes, I'm in IT—but in my own way. Think of me as the bandleader in a tech-savvy orchestra.

Knowing what you want and how to get there. Navigating Microsoft Office, One step at a time.

This month, we will take a look at the "Out of Office" or Auto Reply message.

What do you Want?

OK, you're finally taking that week off after working like a dog for the past 3 months. The weather is in your favor, you have big plans, and no one is going to get in your way. But what happens after you start your vacation? Work continues, right? Incoming emails back up to the point where people are wondering why you haven't gotten back to them regarding an "Important" email that they sent you on Friday just after you turned your computer off. You swore up and down, that this vacation, you promised yourself and maybe to others that mean something to you, that you would NOT be checking your email this vacation. Well, you held up to your promise but unfortunately, it has repercussions. Yep, come the day you return, all those emails are waiting in your inbox. Some important ones that could not wait and others that really had no weight to them and were just casual chat, and then of course the ones that were sent to you by mistake and should have gone to someone else who has the same first name. All but the casual chat emails, I would say that the sender should have been notified that you would be out of the office for the week.

The emails either marked as "High Importance" or "High Priority" or are important and never labeled as High Priority, and the emails that were sent to you on error, the sender should have been notified asap. Who knows, maybe it was an email letting you know that the Admin Basement has no power and needs attention, or maybe its an email being sent to someone with the initials "MK" that needed to be informed about an urgent HR matter.

The point is, your sender needs to be informed, so that that necessary or secondary steps can be taken to remedy the situation.

Your Out of Office or Auto Reply message doesn't need to explain what you are doing while you are off, being that you may want to keep your personal life, well, personal, but it should have the basics. Sometimes , (like Sgt. Friday in Dragnet would say "just the facts Ma'am") plain, simple and precise, is all you need.

Here is an example of an **Out of Office or Auto Reply message** that gives a little too much personal detail and not enough useful information

"I will be off today getting my tonsils removed, _again!_ I should be back in a few days, so If you are trying to reach me regarding an important matter, you know what to do."

And, on the other side of the coin, here is an example of an effective **Out of Office or Auto Reply message**

Thank you for your email. I am out of office until Monday, August 18th. I will respond to your message as soon as possible upon my return. For urgent matters, please contact **TheirName** at TheirName@saratogabridges.org.

Matter that needs to be resolved before I get back, please call the Tech Support hot line at 518-587-0723 extension 1333. Otherwise dial my extension 1235 and leave me a message.

For faster turnaround time on password resets for Email, UKG and Therap, please call the Tech Support hot line at 518-587-0723 ext. 1333 during 7am to 4:30pm Monday thru Friday.

After 4:30p m-f and weekends please call IT on-call at 518-450-9024

Thank you, Mike

How to Get There:

How to set your "Out of Office" reply in 5 steps or less

If you have "Outlook (classic)"

Use this method to navigate to the Automatic Replies tool

Open Outlook>File>Info> Automatic Replies

If you are using the current version of Outlook,

Use this method to navigate to the Automatic Replies tool

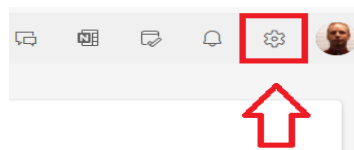**Open Outlook>Settings> Accounts> Automatic Replies**
or
Open Outlook>View>View Settings> Accounts> Automatic Replies

If you are using the Web version of Outlook,

Use this method to navigate to the Automatic Replies tool

Open Outlook> Settings> Account> Automatic Replies

Your settings can be located in the upper

right corner next to your picture or initials.

Using an Automatic Reply saves you time. An Automatic Reply lets your sender know that you are unavailable, when you plan on returning and who to contact if in the event the matter needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. It may contain information such as a contact or a number to call for items that can be resolved while you are away.

Stay Sharp. Work Smarter

Where IT all began
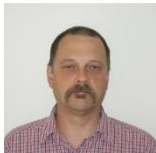
 Our editor has invited us to share how we got our start in IT as a way to introduce ourselves and perhaps inspire some of our readers to pursue their own interests in the field or whatever else interests you. My interest in technology goes back to the time when computers were just being introduced in schools, somewhere around the Ford and Carter administrations. I was fortunate enough to live in a school district where there were funds for technology, so my junior high school had a computer lab. The processor was about twice the size of the copier in the Admin building at Bridges and we "entered" data using these devices called key punch machines. We would type our programs into these machines and they would be stored as cards with little holes in them. Each card was a separate line in the program. The cards would be stacked together, inserted into the processing unit and we would eventually get a printout of the results of whatever we had programmed. It was an intense introduction to programming, and I have carried it with me ever since.

Technology has been an abiding interest for me partially due to the kinds of occupations people in my family did from machinists, to operating and planning engineers. I had an uncle who was especially influential and who eventually helped my buy my first computer for when I went to school, sometime around the Reagan administration. It was an Atari 800 and it ran a very limited collection of programs using what was called a ROM cartridge (think of what we call a "Flash drive" today). Now for those of you who have known me for a while, you may have heard me tell this story when users complain about something being slow, so please indulge me. The Atari was an 8-bit computer with raw processing power roughly 6 orders of magnitude below current PCs running multi-core 64-bit processors. The word processing program (think Microsoft Word) was a program called Atari Writer. The program was stored on a 16 kB ROM cartridge and the time it took to load up the computer's operating system and then the word processor was about 5 minutes. This was plenty of time to step out to make a snack before getting down to work. The documents you would create would be stored on magnetic tape drives. If you had already been working on a paper, you would load a cassette tape into the drive and, depending on the length of the paper, the document would appear on the screen in about 5 minutes. So far, we're 10 minutes into the process and haven't even started work. I won't go on, but I hope you get the point.   It's interesting how our perception of time has gotten shorter as processing power has increased.

There are a few other contributing factors that led me to IT, but space is limited. If nothing else, I would say that the choices I've made were a product of the circumstances I grew up with, the opportunities made available to me, and having a supportive and nurturing family that encouraged me.

How the bus wheels drove me to a great job, then to a great new career.

Dad, what is this thing? a Computer, what is this for? are we replacing mom?

What does it do? well lets go back to 1989 when my father bought our first Tandy computer from Radio Shack for our printing business and my dads last computer from Radio Shack!! The only experience we had was a Compugraphic Typesetter and this was the reason for the New computer. We had no graphic software, so off to Radio Shack I went. Looking through all the graphic software for setting type, I found The Print Shop Pro and a few others, then I came across this new adventure called gaming software called the Indianapolis 500: The Simulation, as this came on a single 3.5. floppy disk. So the rude salesman at radio shack asked if I wanted to see this on the new Tandy? Yes I do. So there it was the start of my computer career in graphic and more important was this simulations software lol, oh yea, and typesetting software called The Print Shop Pro which was interesting as I knew nothing about computers as this was about to change.

So we got this book called Welcome to MS-DOS as we went from using a Compu-graphic typesetting machine to using the Tandy computer for setting type. My mom wanted nothing to do with this thing called a computer after all my mom used to do all the typesetting. My mother now has seen her way out of typesetting and so was my dad. So after 20 years they sold the printing business and I got the Tandy computer. This was the start of my computer life. Then later on I worked for a local screen printing business which specialized in Screen Printing and Graphic Design and along came Corel Draw and Photo Shop Pro. Here I was deep into the Art of a screen printing career for Seri-Graphics for many years until they went out of business in the mid 90s. Then later on I became a School bus driver. Then in 2007 I started working for Saratoga Bridges as a bus driver in Transportation until 2022 then traded the CDL for a Microsoft License and started a new career in IT as a Computer Specialist in the IT Department until present.

This became a very fun job and a solid career with great people to work with and the "Disabled Folks" or Folks as I call them now, this was a really fun job after Jenn took over and made a positive change in transportation!! I heard there was an opening in the IT Department as I new I might not be able to keep my CDL for health reasons I new I was really good with PCs, software and just had the ability to fix them and problem solve or take the educated guess. I said sure why not go and see what this was all about. I got granted another interview and a week later I was given the job which completely surprised me. I was given a chance of a life time doing what I really enjoyed and continues to this day. This is not an easy career the learning never ends which I enjoy! but it helps when you have dedicated Techs willing to help out and a continuous learning education structure that never ends is very awesome. I got this idea to help out other staff, so I asked my boss and was granted to start the Saratoga Bridges Newsletter which is published once a month to help other staff and is produced by other Techs and there educated news articles make for a good read. This newsletter is packed with information and PC tips which can help everyone here at Saratoga Bridges.

just give us a call.

Technology Is for Everyone

Technology is more accessible than ever. You don't need to be "tech-savvy" to start learning. The same curiosity, patience, and problem-solving abilities you use in everyday life are the very skills that help people succeed in the tech world. Whether you're setting up a smart home device, learning to use a new app, or helping someone troubleshoot a phone, you're already interacting with technology—and building confidence with it.

The tech industry can seem daunting, but the truth is that many people enter IT from entirely different career paths—and bring valuable skills with them. You don't need to be able to build a website or know what the purpose of RAM is to begin your journey into Information Technology.

What Is IT and Why It Matters

Information Technology encompasses a wide range of fields, from technical support and cybersecurity to software development, data analysis, and systems administration. In an increasingly digital world, IT professionals are essential for keeping businesses running smoothly, securing sensitive information, and developing tools that improve productivity and customer experience.

Useful Core Skills

While IT has its technical aspects, not all roles require you to be a programming expert from day one. What employers really value are soft skills, especially problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. For example:

- **Problem-solving is the backbone of IT. Whether you're diagnosing a network issue or debugging a website, your ability to analyze problems and implement solutions is crucial.**

- **Creativity helps you think outside the box when designing user interfaces, automating processes, or writing scripts to streamline workflows.**

- **Communication skills are also important. You'll often need to explain complex issues in simple terms to non-technical colleagues or customers.**

Transferable Skills from Other Careers

One of the best things about IT is how well it accommodates people with non-traditional backgrounds. Many skills from retail, healthcare, education, and trades translate surprisingly well to tech.

- **Retail Workers are used to dealing with customers, managing transactions, and multitasking under pressure. These experiences build the patience and people skills needed for roles in help desk support or IT service management.**

- **Teachers often become excellent trainers or instructional designers in IT settings, helping others learn new technologies.**

- **Healthcare Professionals bring attention to detail, compliance awareness, and familiarity with digital health records—making them ideal for roles in health IT or data privacy.**

- **Construction or Maintenance Workers** are used to working with complex systems, troubleshooting mechanical issues, and reading technical documentation. These strengths can lead to careers in network installation or systems administration.

How to Get Started

1. **Learn the Basics:** Start with free or affordable online courses on platforms like Coursera, edX, Udemy, or the multitude of Tech based YouTube videos. Topics like networking fundamentals, cybersecurity, and introductory programming are a great place to begin.

2. **Get Hands-On:** Set up a home lab using virtual machines, build a website, or experiment with automation using PowerShell or Python. Practical experience shows initiative and builds your confidence.

3. **Certifications:** Entry-level certifications like CompTIA A+, Google IT Support, or Microsoft's Azure Fundamentals can open doors and validate your knowledge to employers.

Even if you have no desire to pursue a career in IT, having a basic understanding of how the technology you use every day works is incredibly valuable. Just like you don't need to be a mechanic to know that your car needs gas and regular maintenance to run properly, you don't need to be a software engineer to benefit from knowing how your smartphone, computer, or Wi-Fi network functions. Understanding the basics—like how to protect your data, identify suspicious emails, or troubleshoot a frozen app—empowers you to use technology more safely and effectively. In a world where digital tools are part of everything from banking and healthcare to communication and entertainment, a little tech knowledge goes a long way in staying informed, independent, and secure.

The Funny Pages will be back in the September issue

Thank you all for Reading Our First Anniversary Edition

Please send me your opinions, to continue making this better in every edition.

Send comments to: Editor - Phil Ellsworth pellsworth@saratogabridges.org